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McFarlane out, Poindexter in at NSC

By Jeremiah O'Leary
and Mary Belcher
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National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, frustrated by a growing lack of access to the president, has resigned and will be replaced by Adm. John Poindexter, his chief assistant, according to administration sources.

These sources say that the announcement is being held up only until a successor is chosen.

Mr. Poindexter, 49, is credited with coordinating the October intercept of an EgyptAir jetliner carrying the Arab terrorists who hijacked the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro and killed an American tourist.

Several other names were mentioned earlier yesterday as possible

successors. Lawrence Eagleburger, a former undersecretary of state who has the backing of Secretary of State George Shultz and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, had a good chance for the job until early yesterday afternoon, according to administration sources.

But the plan to appoint Mr. Eagleburger, who is opposed by conservatives who say he talks tough but is not decisive in a crisis, apparently unraveled later in the day, these highly placed sources say.

Others who were under consideration included John Tower, a former Republican senator from Texas and a member of the U.S. arms-control negotiating team, and Navy Secretary John Lehman, who is a former National Security Council staff member.

Mr. Tower, who was chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee for which Mr. McFarlane worked for two years, was the choice of conservatives, according to an influential conservative senator.

Other names advanced by conservatives included former U.N. ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick and Rozanne Ridgway, an assistant secretary of state for European and Canadian affairs.

Mr. McFarlane has been mentioned as a replacement for Mike Mansfield, the 82-year-old ambassador to Japan, but a source close to

Mr. McFarlane said he would not accept another job immediately.

The departure of Mr. McFarlane, which had been rumored for some time, comes largely because White

House Chief of Staff Donald Regan has restricted the national security adviser's previously easy access to President Reagan, creating an "intolerable situation" for the national security adviser, a senior administration official said.

The official said geopolitical issues "get poorly translated" when they go through a non-expert such as the chief of staff.

Mr. McFarlane, who once had an open door to the Oval Office and saw the president three or four times daily, now must go through the chief of staff for access to the president.

Mr. McFarlane, 48, also has grown tired of CIA Director William Casey, who has attempted to go directly to the president with matters Mr.

McFarlane believes should move through the National Security Council, said a source close to Mr. McFarlane.

In addition, Mr. McFarlane has grown increasingly irritated by what the source described as the "insensitivity" of Mr. Shultz, the secretary of state.

Adm. Poindexter, promoted from an NSC military assistant to be Mr. McFarlane's assistant two years ago, graduated first in his 1954 Naval Academy class, has served as an aide to three Navy secretaries and holds a Ph.D. in nuclear physics.

That White House officials yesterday refused to squelch rumors about Mr. McFarlane's job plans fueled speculation that his resignation was forthcoming.

Mr. McFarlane, a soft-spoken but strong-willed ex-Marine, has played an increasingly high-profile role as the president's adviser in recent terrorist attacks on Americans abroad and in the planning and execution of last month's U.S.-Soviet summit.

Sources said Chief of Staff Regan and Mr. Shultz muffled Mr. McFarlane during last month's Geneva summit and "muscle him out of prominence" during the sessions between Mr. Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

The president yesterday would not answer reporters' questions about Mr. McFarlane.

He did say, "We talk every day," when asked if he had spoken to the national security adviser recently.

Neither Mr. McFarlane nor his spokeswoman, Karna Small, could be reached for comment.

There have been rumors over the past several months that infighting between Mr. McFarlane and Mr. Regan had become more intense. Mr. McFarlane also has expressed a desire to spend more time with his family.

White House spokesman Larry Speakes said he could neither confirm nor deny reports that Mr. McFarlane would resign soon.

"I think the president would certainly abide by the judgments of any member of his administration about what they need to do," Mr. Speakes said, leaving open the possibility that Mr. McFarlane has expressed a desire to leave the White House.

"The president has certainly valued his [Mr. McFarlane's] and other members of the national security community's service and continues to value their services," Mr. Speakes said.

Mr. McFarlane had once described his ascension to the post of national security adviser as a "compromise choice," saying that he was not viewed as "a threat" by other senior administration officials.

But in the more than two years he has held the post he has been a highly visible public official, more well known than his immediate predecessors — William Clark and Richard Allen.

Mr. McFarlane is often pictured at the president's side or as an administration spokesman on the evening news and Sunday news programs. He was the most senior official who accompanied Mr. Reagan on his recent six-day California vacation.

One oft-repeated story says that Mr. McFarlane was so in tune with Mr. Reagan that he often signs memos "Robert C. McFarlane for the president."

Mr. McFarlane, whose father, William Doddridge McFarlane, was a Democratic congressman from Texas during the New Deal in the 1930s, was born in Washington. He was graduated from the Naval Academy and was among the first Americans to fight in Vietnam.